

omnibus package that will keep the government funded into next fall.

It was another extremely busy weekend for appropriators—the Members and their staffs. I was on the phone all day Friday, Saturday, Sunday. Every 10 minutes, another call with my colleagues, with the committees, and my staff—my great staff—who hardly slept this weekend to help finalize a deal.

Sunday night was the first night of Hanukkah, but, unfortunately, I had to spend 75 percent of that night on the phone with my colleagues and staff. My family, of course, was very understanding, and I appreciate that.

Sleep has been hard to come by for many who are part of the appropriations process. And while the world enjoyed a truly heart-stopping World Cup final, staff were on the clock working diligently to keep our government funded. I thank all of them for their great work.

Much of my focus today, tonight, and tomorrow will remain on getting the omnibus done. Despite having a little more work to do, the omnibus continues heading in the right direction. We must wrap the whole process up and vote on final passage before the end of the week.

It won't be easy, but we are working hard so we can get it done before the end of the week and be with our families for Christmas.

Once the omnibus comes before the Senate, I am confident that both sides will find things in it they can enthusiastically support. We all know the omnibus will be the best way to ensure kids, our veterans, our small businesses, and our military continue to have full access to vital services and programs they depend on.

It is not going to be everything anybody wants, that is for sure, but it is far preferable to a CR, which will leave the country high and dry. And it is certainly preferable to a government shutdown.

The omnibus will also allow the Senate to pass the Electoral Count Act into law, which my colleagues on the Rules Committee, Senators KLOBUCHAR and BLUNT, have done great work on. And finalizing the omnibus is critical—absolutely critical—for supporting our friends in Ukraine and for fully implementing bipartisan bills like CHIPS and Science and the PACT Act and more.

So just as both parties cooperated on bipartisan achievements like CHIPS, gun safety, veterans' benefits, Respect for Marriage, and so much more, let's finish this session by passing an omnibus by working together in good faith.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The Republican leader is recognized.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, when the Biden administration put out their budget proposal, the Republicans knew it was literally wrong for the country. The administration wanted to cut funding for our Armed Forces, after inflation, while massively increasing spending on nondefense.

Republicans have taken the President's bizarre position and flipped it on its head. The bipartisan government funding bill that Senators LEAHY and SHELBY have finished negotiating does exactly the opposite of what the Biden administration first proposed. This bill provides a substantial real-dollar increase to the defense baseline and a substantial real-dollar cut to the non-defense, nonveterans baseline.

Let me say that again. President Biden wanted to cut defense spending and grow liberal domestic spending in real dollars, but Congress is rejecting the Biden administration's vision and doing the exact opposite. This bill will grow defense spending and cut non-defense, nonveterans spending after inflation.

Just last week, the Senate passed the National Defense Authorization Act on an overwhelming bipartisan basis. Senators on both sides acknowledged that President Biden and his administration had failed—failed—to request the level of resources that our servicemembers and their commanders actually needed. So on a bipartisan basis, we ignored the administration's request and authorized what our Armed Forces actually need.

But the landmark investments in upgrading and modernizing our Armed Forces that we just laid out in the NDAA will not happen unless Congress follows through and appropriates the money to pay the bills. That is what Senators SHELBY and LEAHY have given us the opportunity to achieve: make good on our commitments in the NDAA by following through with actual funding.

Americans want our Nation to remain the preeminent global superpower. We want our country to remain the mightiest civilization the world has ever seen. We want to keep helping Ukraine, keep outcompeting Russia, and keep pace with the huge investments that China is making in their own military and new technologies.

So it is a strange position, to say the least, when Republicans in Congress have to poke and prod a Democratic Commander in Chief into sufficiently funding the men and women that he actually commands. But as I said all along, funding our Armed Forces is a basic governing duty. Republicans were not going to let our Democratic colleagues demand extra leftwing goodies in exchange for doing their job and funding our troops. The President's own party does not get to take our national defense hostage and demand rewards.

So I am grateful that our Democratic colleagues backed down and accepted

our position. The bipartisan bill that our colleagues have negotiated equips our Armed Forces with the resources they need while cutting nondefense, nonveterans spending in real dollars.

This is a strong outcome for Republicans and, much more importantly, it is the outcome that our Nation's security actually needs. So I want to thank our distinguished colleague, Senator SHELBY, for his hard work, and I look forward to reviewing the full text soon.

TRIBUTE TO RICHARD C. SHELBY

Madam President, I saved my tribute to the most senior retiring Republican Member for late in the year. But even with mere days remaining until the end of his term, our colleague's calendar has been quite packed, not with fancy farewell parties but with a final chapter of high-stakes negotiations and tireless legislative work on behalf of his State, our Nation, and, in particular, our Armed Forces. It is no surprise that Senator RICHARD SHELBY's final days in the Senate see him running through the tape and burning the literal midnight oil.

The State of Alabama has sent some prolific and powerful Senators to this Chamber over its history, but RICHARD SHELBY has surpassed them all. He is not just the longest serving Senator from Alabama. He is the most influential. Our friend is one of the most effective legislators the U.S. Senate has ever seen.

Growing up outside Depression-era Birmingham, RICHARD SHELBY was not automatically predestined for the halls of power. But even before our friend had grown into the fullness of his commanding stature, I understand that young RICHARD SHELBY was never afraid to throw his weight around, whether he was fighting for his team on the football field or putting himself between a classmate and a bully on a streetcar.

As a young man, there was hardly any academic or athletic test that RICHARD didn't pass with flying colors. But the way I hear it, the most important test was ensuring that a pretty girl named Annette was delivered back home in time for curfew after their first date.

Annette was intrigued by this handsome young man, but she also loved and respected her own family. So she declared that if RICHARD was late dropping her off, the first date would be the last. Thus, a partnership for the ages was born.

And ever since the SHELBYs' first campaign victory in 1970, the people of Alabama have had a natural campaigner, a trailblazing problem-solver, and an intellectual giant looking out for their interests. And, in addition to Annette Shelby, they have also gotten RICHARD in the package deal.

Dr. Annette Shelby has charted a historic course of her own here in Washington, including becoming the first woman to hold a tenured professorship at Georgetown's Business School.

Meanwhile, across the city, the other half of the SHELBY partnership was developing a reputation for visionary leadership here in Congress. Where RICHARD is concerned, the word “visionary” is neither throwaway praise nor exaggeration. It is simply accurate. People around the Senate like to say that RICHARD SHELBY doesn’t just see down the road; he sees down the road and also around the corner.

Our colleague has not just known how to fight for Alabama and the individual issues and debates that each day has brought. He has also invented creative, new, forward-looking visions and missions that nobody else had dreamed of and then, methodically, set about turning them into reality.

RICHARD has trained his efforts on a small number of core priorities at one time, the places he is most convinced he can make an outsized difference. And once one of those big priorities is identified, he has been like a dog after a bone.

Take the city of Huntsville. As the story goes, a few decades ago it was a sleepy town by the Tennessee border. Today, it is a booming technological hub for cutting-edge industries like space exploration and missile defense.

Or take the Port of Mobile. The way I understand it, the spark was an overseas trip where RICHARD saw firsthand the latest international shipping infrastructure that was rapidly taking shape out in Asia. I think the sentiment was more or less this: If Singapore can do this, why not Mobile?

So today, what used to be a small inlet on the gulf coast is now a booming hub for shipping, a transformation that is sending ripples of prosperity across the entire region.

But even our visionary colleague’s prolific foresight occasionally hit its limits. RICHARD’s good friend, our former colleague Phil Gramm, had the good judgment to switch to the Republican Party way back in 1983. He immediately started working on his good buddy to follow suit. But even after a charm offensive that I am told involved multiple White House lunches with President Reagan, even after Robert Byrd had skeptically accused Senator SHELBY of harboring “definite Republican tendencies,” it still took our friend until after the Republicans’ landslide victories in 1994 to finally cross the threshold and join our team. Well, the rest is history.

The iconic phrase “Chairman SHELBY” could refer to our colleague’s time steering sensitive oversight at the helm of the Intelligence Committee, or his mastery of the most complex matters as head of the Banking Committee, or his time lending a steady hand to institutional priorities as Rules Committee chair, or, more recently, the years our colleague has spent in the No. 1 or No. 2 slots on top of the Appropriations Committee, directing the American people’s money into key national priorities, most especially our constitutional duty to provide for the common defense.

But RICHARD’s Washington expertise never came at the expense of his home-State roots—just the opposite. The national renown that RICHARD SHELBY accrued was just a pathway by which his beloved Alabama came to punch more and more above its weight.

A long line of SHELBY staffers have learned that there is no need for a road map or a GPS when they have got the Senator himself in the car. Our friend knows every single backroad and highway exit. He knows every good “meat and three.” And if there is ever time to stop in for lunch or coffee, just pick a spot, and RICHARD will know a handful of the folks inside.

How exactly has our colleague sustained this level of sharpness and influence over such a historic career?

Well, for one thing, I understand the seasoned chairman is a frequent visitor to the “Health Committee.” That is his moniker for the Senate gym.

Likewise, I have it on good authority that, at one point, our friend held the distinction of having more books checked out in his name from the Library of Congress than any other Member in either Chamber.

Occasionally, having such a voracious reader for a colleague can lead to trouble. Years ago, shortly after the passing of President Reagan, I was wrapping up a meeting with my Banking Committee colleague when I half-wondered whether we could find a way to honor the Gipper with a place on our currency. With no particular malice toward Alexander Hamilton in mind, I loosely suggested: What about, perhaps, the \$10 bill?

But, alas, little did I know that I was sitting across from the most recent person in America to finish Ron Chernow’s gigantic, newly released biography of Hamilton. This was the book that would go on to inspire the hit musical and spark a big revival of interest in Hamilton. RICHARD SHELBY had spent weeks eating up every single page, admiring Hamilton’s genius more and more with every chapter.

So let’s just say, a few minutes later I was back at the drawing board.

It is difficult to imagine the Senate without RICHARD SHELBY, but I am not too concerned that the opposite will hold true. As much as RICHARD has loved this institution and excelled in it, we know our colleague can imagine life beyond the Senate just fine. There will be even more time to stay a student of history, even more time for duck hunting with good friends. The visionary brainstorming for Alabama and our Nation won’t stop—oh, no. But our friend will get to balance it out with a whole lot more time with his beloved Annette, their two sons, and their grandkids—more time to enjoy the home State that has been literally transformed by RICHARD’s passion and vision.

RICHARD, thank you very much for an outstanding career.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Illinois.

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, I came to the floor to speak on another topic, but I want to join in the comments of the Republican leader about RICHARD SHELBY of Alabama.

We became friends under different political circumstances when he served in the House of Representatives. It has been my honor to count him as a friend and to have the occasion to travel with him and Annette, his wife, in the past. I am going to miss my friend.

I wish you well, and I am sure you have got some football to watch in Alabama when you get home.

FOR-PROFIT COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

Madam President, in this Congress, the Democrats have shown up for everyday Americans. We passed historic legislation to build infrastructure. We became a global leader in chip manufacturing. We improved gun safety. We protected our climate. These are wins for Americans, and they make headline news.

Today, I want to talk about an issue that may not get the headlines, but it is just as important to fixing our broken student loan system and ensuring that Americans can go to school and participate fully in our economy and maintain our Nation’s competitive edge. I am talking about holding for-profit colleges accountable. I have been coming to the floor for almost 10 years on this topic. I believe, in my heart of hearts, that what is going on here is unfair to students, their families, and taxpayers.

Why is it essential to bring this issue up frequently? Two numbers, and these two will be on the final. So pay close attention. The numbers are 8 and 30. For-profit colleges enroll only 8 percent of America’s college students—8 percent—but they account for 30 percent of Federal student loan defaults.

How can that be—8 percent of the students and 30 percent of the student loan defaults? The answer is obvious. The schools charge too much. They offer too little. Those who don’t drop out end up with worthless diplomas. In a sentence, that is the problem. It is built on a business model, this for-profit college business. It is not built on an educational model.

First, for-profit colleges deliberately lure in first-generation and low-income students with slick marketing that the community colleges can’t even match.

Second, they pressure students to take on as much debt as possible to pay for the courses, and they charge a lot more than community colleges in offering good, quality educational courses.

Third, once the students are enrolled and are on the hook for huge amounts of debt, these for-profit colleges provide low-quality education and very little support. If a student graduates from a for-profit college and ends up with a degree that is practically worthless, finding a working job that will pay them any kind of money to pay back the loan is next to impossible.